

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested.

The Examiner's attention is especially drawn to the attached Notice of Opposition that has just been received from an EPO counterpart of the present application. It will be noted that four new references have been cited on the fourth page of the enclosed copy of this paper. The applicant is currently obtaining an English translation of the French language opposition paper as well as copies of the cited references and English translations where appropriate. Such further materials will be forwarded as soon as they become available. In the meantime, the Examiner's attention is drawn to this Notice of Opposition paper and an associated Form PTO-1449 for consideration.

The specification has been amended so as to include section headings as requested by the Examiner.

The objection to claims 5 and 10-12 for improper multiple dependency is not understood. It appears that perhaps applicant's preliminary amendment of June 5, 2000 was not entered (as it should have been). That is, as filed, when the preliminary amendment is correctly entered, there are no multiply dependent claims.

The rejection of claims 1-4 and 6-9 under 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph is respectfully traversed.

The claim language has been amended above so as to avoid the apparent ambiguity referenced by the Examiner. Clearly the specification is replete with complete and enabling description of method and apparatus for providing to each user a respectively different visual display that depicts the common virtual conference space, including the user icons for all other users, from each particular user's own unique and different viewpoint. See, for example, Figures 5-12 and associated text in the specification.

The rejection of claims 1-4 and 6-9 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph is also respectfully traversed.

Once again, the claim language has been amended above so as to avoid the possible ambiguity or "contradiction" being referenced by the Examiner. Quite frankly, the quoted language of "...each user being presented with a viewpoint..." and the recitation of a "viewpoint presented to each user" does not present any contradiction insofar as the undersigned can ascertain. Indeed, these two quotations are entirely consistent with one another.

The rejection of claims 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 9 under 35 U.S.C. §102 as allegedly anticipated by Kouno is respectfully traversed.

At page 5, lines 2-3 of the Office Action, the Examiner alleges that Kouno "further teaches removing the user's own avatar from this display (Figure 13)". However, the

undersigned does not understand where the Examiner obtains such teaching from the Kuono reference. Based on the icons that have been used in Figures 13 and 14, it would appear that the user's own icon is represented at the center of both Figures 13 and 14. While only two users are represented in Figure 13, that would probably be related to the fact that a game of tic-tac-toe is apparently being played on the transparent board. Neither the legend associated with Figure 13 or the single sentence associated with Figure 13 in the accompanying text in any way teaches that the user's own avatar is removed from the display shown in Figure 13. Should the Examiner continue to feel differently, it is respectfully requested that the express teaching that is here being referenced be particularly pointed out.

Similarly, the Examiner alleges on page 5, at lines 13-15 of the Office Action that Figure 13 somehow teaches that "the user may move towards or away from the other avatars the view field will change to fit them using a navigator". Once again, the undersigned has been unable to find any such teaching of a "navigator" -- and especially has been unable to find any such teaching in connection with Figure 13. Once again, the Examiner is respectfully requested to particularly point out exactly where such alleged teaching can be found in this reference.

As should be apparent from the applicant's specification, each user is presented with a virtual space in which he/she is able to move about. The "virtual space" is presented to each user from the unique viewpoint of that particular individual user (who

therefore does not necessarily appear on the screen). However, the users are not all presented with identical depictions of the "virtual space". The elements which appear in the space (apart from the individual user himself) are the same, but they may be depicted from different viewpoints. The positions of the individual elements of the virtual space are selected in practice, in the exemplary embodiment, such that the user has a clear view of all of them -- in other words they all appear within the user's field of view. Thus the positions of each element of the virtual space seen by an individual user are selected according to the viewpoint of that individual user.

In the example given in the exemplary embodiment each user sees the elements of the virtual space representing the other users as being grouped together so that they will appear within a reasonable field of view.

As above amended, independent claims 1 and 6 also now require representations of the users to be animated -- carrying out symbolic actions. There is a basis for specifying that the representations are animated, e.g., on page 7 of the specification.

As previously noted, in applicant's exemplary embodiment each user is presented with a different view of the virtual space, in which the relative positions of the individual users may be different. For example, viewer A and viewer B will both see users C and D, but not necessarily in the same relative positions (Users A and B would of course also see each other but not themselves). In the prior art system cited by the Examiner the virtual

world represents a mirror in which all the users are facing the same direction and all users see each other in the same relative positions.

It should be understood that although applicant refers to different views of the virtual space presented to each individual user, those views of virtual space are related to each other by certain properties in the exemplary embodiment. In particular the same users (except for the viewing user itself) appear in each view of virtual space and the order in which the individual users appear round the virtual table is the same. However, the angular separation of the individual users from each other may vary, in order to improve the visibility of individual users. This is not essential to the invention in its broader aspects -- for example an individual user may wish to rearrange the avatars to suit his/her own preferences, but in the exemplary system as envisaged the order of the avatars round the table (but not their separation) is kept constant so that interactions between individuals are more realistic. For example, users are likely to interact with their immediate neighbors in ways which they would not necessarily do if they are several spaces away.

The rejection of claims 3 and 8 under 35 U.S.C. §103 as allegedly being made "obvious" based on Kouno in view of Shiio '743 is also respectfully traversed.

Fundamental deficiencies of the primary Kouno reference have already been noted above with respect to independent claims 1 and 6. The secondary reference to Shiio '743

does not supply those deficiencies. In fact, Shiiio '743 (which is one of the references already acknowledged and discussed in the introductory portions of applicant's specification) appears to be directly contrary to applicant's claimed invention. For example, like Kouno, Shiiio '743 also fails to teach a teleconferencing method wherein the user's own visual display is a unique display viewing the visual space from the user's own unique viewpoint. Furthermore, the Examiner's suggestion that it would somehow be "obvious" to modify Kouno so as to provide only a fixed field of view in the Kouno system appears illogical and contrary to the Kouno teaching.

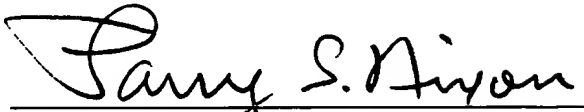
The Examiner's attention is also drawn to new claims 13-22. It will be noted that new method claim 13 and apparatus claim 18 both require, *inter alia*, displaying to each conferee a respectively unique visual display that depicts the virtual conference space, and the other user icons, from that particular conferee's own unique viewpoint. The dependent claims add yet further patentable distinctions to the claimed subject matter.

Accordingly, this entire application is now believed to be in allowable form and a formal Notice to that effect is respectfully solicited.

MC GRATH
Appl. No. 09/555,725
November 21, 2003

Respectfully submitted,

NIXON & VANDERHYE P.C.

By: 
Larry S. Nixon
Reg. No. 25,640

LSN:vc
1100 North Glebe Road, 8th Floor
Arlington, VA 22201-4714
Telephone: (703) 816-4000
Facsimile: (703) 816-4100